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ABSTRACT

The Team Reading Project at Suffolk Community College is designed to aid college students with academic, cultural, linguistic, or economic deficiencies through a 1-semester course in study skills and remedial work in reading, mathematics, and writing. Four instructors coordinate the program, aided by a counselor. The reading component is the focal point of the program, the reading instructor working closely with the other instructors in selecting materials. The establishment of a team reading program requires first that a broad-based planning committee of faculty, a librarian, and a research director be established to handle preliminary details and specify broad goals for the program. Data then must be collected on the students, including survey tests, analytic/semidiagnostic tests, and informal reading tests in content areas. After data are interpreted, tentative behavioral objectives and methodologies are established by the instructors. The instructors are vital to the success of the program in that they must be cooperative, flexible, and open to criticism. The instructors, with the help of the research director, also have the responsibility of final total evaluation of the program. Evaluative procedures include measures of academic and attitudinal changes and the reactions of both faculty and students. (VJ)

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ESTABLISHING A TEAM READING PROGRAM

Oliver Patterson

I joined the faculty of Suffolk Community College with the task of establishing a reading program to serve the needs of the students at this institution. By describing the procedures I undertook, it will hopefully provide guidelines for those who wish to begin implementing a Team Reading Program. Initially, however, I will briefly describe the total Team program to provide a framework for understanding the team reading course.

Team is an educational response to students who enter college with academic deficiencies, cultural differences, linguistic handicaps or economic deprivations. It attempts, in a single semester to remediate identifiable reading, writing, and mathematical skill weaknesses. Moreover, it attempts to teach study skills, and to fill educational voids which might preclude success in college. An integral part of the team program is its emphasis upon student advisement and counselling. Those directly involved with the students of Team include four instructors; one from each of the following areas; humanities, science, mathematics, reading, social science, and a counselor. Each of the above instructors is also a student in Team, in that, he is regularly scheduled to sit in one of the above classes. Thus, the social science instructor visits at least one of the reading, mathematics, science, and humanities classes during a week.

The cultural component of Team is very important. Every Wednesday of each week there are student-faculty cooperatively planned activities. During the semester students have visited museums; made ecological field observations; viewed such films as: David and Lisa, Twelve Angry Men, A Time for Burning, Night and the Fog, and Nothing But A Man. Moreover, there are future plans to attend a Broadway play and to hear guest lecturers from the immediate and

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surrounding community. A less visible cultural activity are the informal "rap" sessions held at student and faculty homes. These "fireside chats" serve as a forum for free expression of ideas, and most importantly assist in breaking down invisible barriers which hinder student-teacher discourse.

Team reading is a single course in the total program, but it is acknowledged to be the focal point or core of the academic program. The reading instructor's responsibility includes the teaching of reading and study skills required in all disciplines. Therefore, any reading material assigned in the course is also analyzed and used as instructional material by the reading instructor. Obviously, each teacher in Team is fully cognizant of his role as a "reading instructor". Thus, advice is given by the reading specialist on the selection of materials, and its method of presentation.

The establishment of a comprehensive Team program is obviously not a simple matter. Interestingly enough, Team did not begin as a program for only educationally disadvantaged students. It was and is felt by many at our college that Team should be taken by every entering college student. Other departments are beginning to consider a Team approach and we hope to more than double the size of our program next year. But, the mechanics of organizing a Team Reading Program have not been answered.

First, I would suggest that a committee of faculty members, representing different departments, who share a common committment to a program such as Team be formed. This has several advantages; which are: (1) by establishing a pilot committee many of the potential administrative and educational problems can initially be obviated before the final presentation to the faculty senate; (2) having representatives from different departments indicates a recognition on the part

some members of every department of the educational problems they encounter, and moreover, these representatives may suggest individuals whom they feel could teach in a program as demanding as Team. I would also suggest that a librarian and the Director of Institutional Research be a part of such a committee.

The Director of Institutional Research is a most valuable individual. In establishing the Team program our director, Dr. Paul Libassi, was able to provide us with statistical correlations of the probability of student success and student reading ability. Moreover, he can serve to interpret test results to administrators, teaching faculty, and counsellors.

With the aid of the data provided, the committee should now be prepared to indicate the number of students to be served and the physical facilities needed. But the most important function of the committee should be the indication of broad goals. The specific behavioral goals and methodology should be the function of those instructors who will eventually teach in the program.

This original planning committee can also serve as an advisory resource body once the actual teachers have been selected. We have found this committee to be an excellent liaison to the entire faculty. For example, we have selected certain students to sit in on classes other than Team courses, and members of the committee have often contacted cooperating instructors.

The rationale for a Team-Reading approach to the educational problems presented by educationally different students must be clearly formulated. First, it should be indicated that reading and writing are skills utilized throughout the curricula and that to provide isolated sections of reading and writing classes divorced from the content areas, though valuable, is certainly less efficient in terms of student progress. Second, the college community must be made aware of the extreme difficulty, and at times futility, of providing students who are

reading below the 25th percentile with material at a college level. Yet, this is a rather normal procedure at many colleges. One often finds students reading well below the 25th percentile in a reading course, making commendable progress, yet failing their normal courses.

After the Team concept has been approved, the reading specialist needs to examine three areas: input (student abilities and disabilities); Methodology (course of instruction); and evaluation (criteria for success).

The group reading tests can provide part of the input data; however, the reading specialist should establish clear guidelines to obtain further data.

After the initial screening performed by the survey test, an analytical, semi-diagnostic test which provides more diagnostic data should be selected. We selected the Iowa Test of Silent Reading skills; however, other equally fine tools exist. I must state that I am still looking for a better instrument to utilize. I have found that the extreme emphasis upon speed overly penalizes students who have linguistic deficits. Moreover, many of the selections do not, I feel, test what they're intended to test. I have ordered specimen copies of the California Test in hopes that it will provide more reliable data.

Once the above tests have been analyzed informal reading tests should be given to assess students' reading abilities in the content areas. I selected material from introductory mathematics, social science, science, and humanities books, and utilizing the cloze procedure and openended questions I was able to obtain a clearer picture of particular reading strengths and weaknesses in the content areas.

Other data of vital concern are: (1) The linguistic background of the students, (2) The socio-economic-cultural level of the students; (3) The academic and career goals of the students; (4) The students previous academic record. Much of this data was obtained from the Student Personnel Division of the college.

Once this data has been compiled, analyzed and interpreted by the academic teaching faculty, behavioral course objectives and methodologies should be established. For instance, each instructor at Suffolk prepared a tentative course outline stating the specific behavioral outcomes he desired. Much of the tentative reading material to be used was also discussed. I use the word "tentative" intentionally because a team program involves a committment to innovation, which assumes maximum flexibility.

As an example, much of my academic preplanning had to be reassessed and reworked to mesh with the others. The mathematics and science instructors had to compromise at different points in order to truly integrate their courses. The humanities instructors had to omit some of the more esoteric reading assignments. The social science instructor had to compromise on the extent of outside assignments.

I hope it is evident that perhaps the largest danger to the success of the program are the personalities of the team staff. The staff must be flexible, open to criticism, and cooperative. If the team is to succeed, meetings are extremely important. They provide an opportunity to, (1) share insights; (2) correlate material; (3) review successes and assess failures; (4) evaluate student growth.

The final responsibility of the team faculty is the total evaluation of the program. The evaluation should be performed in a variety of ways. With the assistance of the Director of Institutional Research, much of the measureable gains will be analyzed. With the assistance of the counselling division, changes in behavior and attitude will be assessed. Moreover, the faculty will do a self-evaluation, and the students will also evaluate the program. However, it should be remembered that Team was initiated to improve the academic performance of students.

Those who currently compose the teaching team will act as faculty advisers for the team students during the remainder of their college years to maintain contact with the students.

It is vitally important that a meaningful structure is established for the Team program to succeed. The overall coordinator of our program is Dean Pease, Assistant Dean of Instruction. I am the academic coordinator, and Miss Natalie Brown is the coordinator of counselling.

The original planning committee acts as an advisory-resource body, it is chaired by Professor Cox. Professor Dave Cox was the dynamic Chairman of the Team Committee and deserves maximum praise.

In summary, to establish a Team Reading Program one must clearly have the objectives defined, organize a Planning Committee, involve the total college community, establish a workable framework, select flexible and dedicated instructors, obtain diagnostic data, plan methodology, and establish evaluative procedures. I have found Team to be the most exciting educational experience I have encountered, and I hope others of you will establish such a program.